

illustrated the danger of admitting the enemy into your house by the back door.

In view of Hitler's habit of striking hammer blows at brief intervals, Chamberlain announced on March 31 that the British and French Governments would give Poland all support in their power " in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces/' A week later, after a visit of Colonel Beck to London, he added that the two Governments were ready to transform the unilateral assurance of support into a permanent treaty of mutual assistance. The agreement was concluded for five years on August 25. It was a momentous commitment which might at any moment automatically involve us in a war for which neither our army nor our air force was adequately prepared. Our obligations were further extended by a promise to Roumania, where a German economic ultimatum was feared, and to Greece, who felt herself threatened by Italy's rape of Albania. On May 12 England and Turkey declared their intention to co-operate if an act of aggression led to war in the Mediterranean, and followed up the declaration by a treaty of mutual aid. Before March 15 we were pledged to render military support to five countries in case of attack—Portugal, France, Belgium, Egypt (for twenty years) and Irak (for twenty-five years after our mandate ended in 1932). Four more had now been added to the list. To meet our mounting liabilities, the Territorial Force was doubled and compulsory training for six months was introduced for men between 20 and 21, our first taste of conscription in time of peace.

Negotiations with Russia for mutual assistance, if either country were involved in war through support to an aggressed

state, began with an inquiry what she would do if Germany attacked Roumania. Instead of answering the question, she proposed an international conference at Bucharest, which, perhaps unwisely, we declined on the ground that the need for action was immediate. The problem of securing her assistance against the domination of Europe by Germany proved more formidable than was expected, for, as Lord Halifax explained, we had to deal with the new German technique of indirect aggression. The chief difficulty, he pointed out on June 8, was the position of the Baltic states, to whose feelings we paid more consideration than Russia. " We should not thrfrc it right to attempt to thrust assurances